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DO THE ARTS MAKE FOR PEACE?



BY

PROFESSOR FRANK JEWETT MATHER, JR.

Princeton University

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The Executive Committee of the Association for International Conciliation wish to arouse the interest of the American people in the progress of the movement for promoting international peace and relations of comity and good fellowship between nations. To this end they print and circulate documents giving information as to the progress of these movements, in order that individual citizens, the newspaper press, and organizations of various kinds may have readily available accurate information on these subjects.

For the information of those who are not familiar with the work of the Association for International Conciliation, a list of its publications will be found on page 14.

DO THE ARTS MAKE FOR PEACE?

Believing as I do that the arts will some day make powerfully for peace, I must admit that in the past they have often added to the splendor of war and supplied motives for conquest. One recalls ancient galleys bearing the statues of Syracuse or Sybaris to Rome, the ox-teams of Napoleon dragging over the passes the choicest pictures of Italy and Spain, and only yesterday, the soldiers representing our own civilized world looting the Imperial Palace at Peking. All this goes to show that human nature must change considerably before the arts become actively the ally of peace. But I am writing for people who see in the past not the limitation of the future but its storehouse of gradually unfolding potentialities, and I ask the reader to imagine what would be the result if into our modern industrial and commercial civilization were introduced as general a practice of the arts and as diffused a love of the beautiful as existed in ancient Athens or in mediæval Paris.

And this is no vague supposition but a reasonable forecast. We are plainly in a time of expansion and improvement as regards the arts. Something like the old-time desire for them begins to manifest itself. National and civic art, after a period of indifference, has reasserted itself strongly in England, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, Spain, and the Americas. France has never let the tradition fail. And not merely is the civic demand palpable, but public art is

responsively improving in quality. Much remains to be done, for despite great isolated figures the collapse of art about the middle of the last century was complete and disastrous, but whoever compares the sculpture, mural painting, or decoration of fifty years ago—I mean the average product, with that of to-day—will note a great improvement in taste and workmanlike excellence. Within the past century the great museums of France, England, Prussia, and the United States have been founded, while those of Austria, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands have greatly prospered in wealth and popularity. Aside from these official activities, the mere creation of new fortunes implies an enhanced interest in art. Art creeps perforce into all permanent and satisfactory expressions of wealth. A man may think he is merely fostering learning or charity, but if his architect be competent he is leaving monumental libraries, colleges and hospitals for the æsthetic delight of posterity. And apart from such incidental and inevitable patronage of art by philanthropic or merely careless wealth, there is much direct and even some intelligent patronage. To form a picture gallery is often the first instinct of new opulence. Through the preposterous prices thus paid for pictures, art at least gets notoriety. Rembrandt tardily takes his place beside Mr. Rockefeller as an exemplar of a lucrative industry. And while our millionaires are wresting the accredited treasures of older art from aristocracy, in the most democratic fashion possible the illustrated magazine and even the advertisement are bringing a respectable and an improving grade of pictorial art to the millions. Here is a jumble of activities, vanities, cruder and finer desires, which shows at least that art

is very much alive in our civilization. Whatever the æsthetic worth of the achievement—a consideration apart from my theme, here is a social force vigorously growing which, should it assume unity and direction, may profoundly affect the relations of man to man and of nation to nation.

And here I wish to distinguish honestly between mere hopes and well-grounded probabilities in the case. It is possible, though I fear not probable, that the demand for public art and for private luxury of a seemingly sort may gradually restore to the world a compact and influential class of artist-artisans. Such a class would develop within the collective consciousness a strong local feeling. By its intelligence and repute this class might easily exercise a local balance of power. It actually did so in the mediæval communes. Such sentiment for craft and locality would be an appreciable makeweight against the exaggerated nationalism within which, bereft of rational and religious sanctions, the war spirit has made its ultimate refuge. Historically the preponderance of the artisan class in Italy actually diminished the frequency and even more the duration and atrocity of warfare. In particular Italy, with her truly Grecian refractoriness to an absolute Church or State, was almost wholly spared those religious persecutions which disfigure the history of all the northern nations. And if this moderating influence of the artist-artisan class is clearly traceable through centuries in which war, upheld by philosopher, statesman, and prelate was the normal condition, how much more powerful might that restraining influence be in times when even the politician appeals with hesitation to the God of Battles. I firmly

believe that the future of the peace movement rests largely with the artisans of the world. And the artist-artisan would evidently have greater incentives to be a peace lover than his associates in the merely mechanical trades. Conscious zest in the work of every day, contentment with one's lot, appreciation of the excellence of the work of fellow craftsmen in foreign lands, these are notable counter-impulses to the traditional spell of war—notable offsets in sane local self-interest and generous international admiration to the narrow intensity and malignity of modern nationalism. Whoever is giving work to artist-artisans and so re-establishing an order apparently superseded by the machine is in some measure promoting the cause of peace.

What is more certain to come about than the rehabilitation of fine craftsmanship is the gradual establishment of an *élite* bound together internationally by bonds of artistic admiration. The present phase of masterful but indiscriminating accumulation of works of art will eventually yield to fine and widespread appreciation. Private treasures will find their way to the museums, which are already joining hands with the public schools. In collecting we have to-day an internationalism based largely on fad and commercial solicitation; there will surely come instead an internationalism based on taste—an unconscious but effective freemasonry comprising with the artists much of the intellect and wealth of the world. And these generous admirations interlocking across political borders, and asserting a spiritual comity between chosen men of different flags and race will make energetically against that national exclusiveness and mistrust which

is the very root of war. The spirit of fellowship in the arts is already keenly alive. In a period of tariff wars and scramble for protection what industry has lobbied assiduously at Washington in order that the foreign competing product may be admitted duty free? Why, the artists of America. To three-quarters of our more prominent painters, sculptors, and architects, Paris is a second fatherland. It is clearly to them we must look to free us from provincial mistrust of France as a fount of frivolity if not of positive evil. And the times emphatically call for new and wiser mediation between nations. Our universal habit of travel has not so much leveled out as given new edge to old vague hostilities. Nobody is more convinced of the hopeless private immorality and national decay of the French than the tourist who has dutifully inspected the Parisian enormities especially contrived for his patronage. He who has actually squabbled with a German postal clerk is forever convinced that German bumptiousness threatens the world's peace. To have halted overnight in the Bay of Naples is vividly to confirm a previous impression that the Italians have no other occupations than petty extortion and singing to the guitar. In short, modern tourism, far from promoting international good feeling actually gives form and durability to old prejudices, and we sadly need counterbalancing influences making for international understanding and respect. Wherever there is sound thought among traders, financiers, scholars, statesmen, these influences are already potentially at work. In the realm that broadly speaking belongs to the arts we find these rational motives for peace even stronger because tinged with

emotion. The artist and art lover may or may not realize that it is good policy to be at peace with other nations; a more immediate conviction teaches such gentle souls that the touch of war in lands famed for historic beauty—whether in France or China, England or India, Germany or Japan, is a kind of sacrilege. Admittedly such a sentiment has never spared any land in the past, and unaided would probably avert no future war, but it easily might become a powerful element in the complex of motives that will ultimately change man from a bellicose into a peaceful creature.

Where lies the weakness of the peace movement? Plainly in the fact, that while its arguments are admittedly good, an enormous mass of traditional emotion still says no to what the reason of mankind already approves. Most thoughtful persons will admit that war is theoretically absurd, that its moral cost is appalling, and its verdicts inconclusive, but most of these rationally convinced foes of war remain emotionally and practically its friends. They retain a sentiment that it is an ultimate test of manhood or nationality, that it evokes the most heroic and admirable traits of human nature, that its recurrence keeps life and history perennially interesting. So long as these emotions hold sway, war will exist. International declarations that war does not pay, arbitration treaties, peace congresses, rationalistic propaganda of whatever order, may and undoubtedly will decrease the frequency of war; abolish it they cannot until the heart of mankind tardily and reluctantly endorses the judgment of its intellect. Men's thinking has already been measurably converted to the ideal of peace; remains the far more difficult task of converting men's

feeling. It was, I believe, that great and generous soul, the late William James, who perceived clearly that we must find emotional equivalents in peace for the glamour surrounding the heroic aspects of war. He held that a discerning spirit would readily find such romantic satisfactions in the normal processes of society. We need only bring into the general consciousness the heroic aspects of the callings of nurse, physician, engineer, explorer, investigator. Better yet, in organized attack upon vice and ignorance, in charity of all sorts, we might find compensation for the moral glow that will undoubtedly pass out of the world with the passing of war. I shall not be suspected of depreciating the cogent rational motives for peace, when I say that until these are warmed into temperamental preferences, emotions near and dear to the average citizen, peace will be far away. And I raise quite frankly an issue perhaps distasteful to doctrinaire peace advocates because it suggests the preciousness of all emotions already enlisted in the good cause and capable of intensification. So convinced am I that the appeal must ultimately be to the heart of men, that I feel no emotional ally of any sort is negligible; for whenever the predilection for peace is established it will consist of a complex of motives many so trivial that were I prophetically to enumerate them I should be thought to play with a serious theme.

And among the most valuable motives available should be and may be the love of beauty, the respect for the creator of it—the artist, and the artist's own passionate preference for a social adjustment that excludes disorder, violence, ugliness. Among art-loving nations in the past the artist enjoyed amid wars an

ambassadorial immunity. This fact E. H. Blashfield, the well-known mural painter has recalled eloquently in a recent address before the American Academy of Arts and Letters. "The artist," he said, "so far as his personal security was concerned, carried the truce of God with him. Through the fourteenth century Italy was a battle-field, but Giotto and his painters, Giovanni Pisano and his sculptors, Arnolfo and his architects, went up and down the battle-field unharmed, and entered through the breached walls of cities to paint allegorical pictures of the blessings of peace in the town halls." That such immunity for the artist surprises us to-day merely shows that we love art less than the early Italians, and comprehend less humanely the peculiar character of the artist's task. Removed by the joy of his work from the commoner contentions, pursuing on an international plane an emulation devoid of the bitterness of industrial competition, perforce an exemplar of orderliness and disciplined enthusiasms, the artist is in the nature of things the friend of peace, and whoever enlarges the demand for art in the world and thereby increases the influence of the artist is measurably furthering the peace of the world. I do not wish to exaggerate. Evidently the sentiment for art, even though widely diffused, will be merely one of many auxiliaries to those major convictions and emotions—the sense of the folly of war and horror at its cruelty—which must eventually bring us peace. It is enough if I have shown a manifest community of interest between the cause of peace and that of the arts. All who intelligently foster the handicrafts are working against war, but those who encourage the artist and the artist-artisan are in a more

definite and direct way working toward peace. And we have seen that the arts supply precisely the kind of aid that is most difficult to procure, emotional preferences not merely opposed to the brutalities of war but positively attached to the contrary graces of peace.

It is not enough that we make war seem horrible. Mankind is of tough fibre, and for tens of thousands of years has willingly accepted such horrors as in the day's work. We must make peace seem attractive, we must combat the prejudice, not wholly an unfair one, against a social order tediously engrossed with the routine of breeding, feeding, producing commodities and buying and selling them. We must reckon with man's need of glamour, romance, thrill. And if anyone imagines that the arts cannot and do not furnish most of that which makes the peaceful state not merely sensible, but delightful, let him imagine with me a state of universal peace and prosperity wholly deprived of the ministry of the arts. There would be sanitary dwellings in that land and doubtless baths and gymnasiums, but no green boulevards would bring the country into the town nor would the grassy rises and skilfully arranged copses and paths of parks simulate nature in her most ingratiating aspects; for these things, though we do not realize it, are part of art. In our Utopia would be convenient public offices, but no stately buildings would rear their marble towers toward the sky, nor would light and shadow play intricately amid the beautiful complication of cornice or colonnade. There would be building but no architecture. Doubtless our inæsthetic peaceful State would commemorate its great dead, but neither graceful column nor imposing statue would rise in the city

vistas, nor would jewel-like memorial window be found in church or civic hall. Naturally inscriptions would set forth the merits of the dead, but the phrases would have neither the harmony nor cadence that stirs men. Worship there would presumably be, in model ventilated churches, but vault would not be married to column; neither painting nor sculpture would suggest the objects of veneration; nor would organ or choir fill the sanctuary with calming and uplifting strains. A people wise enough to choose peace would surely be interested in its own history and in the passions that rule men. So there would be history and literature, dull statistical pages from which enthusiasm had been scrupulously eliminated. The popular novelists, if such an emotion as that implied in popularity were permitted, would write in the manner of Auguste Comte or Karl Marx. There would be books but no art of literature. The glory of the form of man would be interpreted solely in terms of labor, hygiene, and childbearing; the daily pageant of the sun and the progress of the seasons in terms of crops, for the sculptor and painter would be lacking. The stress of sex and the need of fellowship would persist, and people would mate as advised or permitted by the health officers, but no lover would set down in verse the glow of all who love, no song would immortalize the finer rhythms of passion, no playwright would capture or player represent the follies, sublimities, and endearing oddities of human nature. There might be a theatre coldly reflecting society, but no art of the drama, no music, no poetry.

To enlarge upon this sketch of a land in which peace and prosperity rule without the aid of the arts is

surely unnecessary. Would peace on such terms be desirable or for that matter endurable? Would not mankind virtually deprived of the hazards and joys of the imagination, to regain them gladly betake itself once more to the hazards and joys of war? For every ennui, headbreaking would come once more into vogue. If we fail, then, to see that without art peace has small allurements, it is either because we inconsiderately take art for granted or define it too narrowly. May our unblest vision of a world with every beatitude save that of art suggest the truth that when art declines the inducements to peace fall away, but when art flourishes war stands permanently rebuked. In the past this relation has been obscured partly through the sentimental glamour shed about war, partly through an equally sentimental over-exaltation of art as a lovely superfluity. When the future shall bring right feeling about war and right thinking about art their eternal antagonism will appear, and the friends of art will seem from that very fact to be the friends of peace.

FRANK JEWETT MATHER, JR.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Nos. 1-48, inclusive (April, 1907-November, 1911). Including papers by Baron d'Estournelles de Constant, George Trumbull Ladd, Elihu Root, Barrett Wendell, Charles E. Jefferson, Seth Low, William James, Andrew Carnegie, Philander C. Knox, Pope Pius X, and others. A list of titles and authors will be sent on application.

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51. Do the Arts Make for Peace ? by Frank Jewett Mather, Jr. February, 1912.

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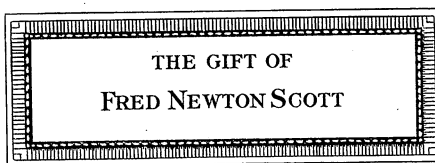
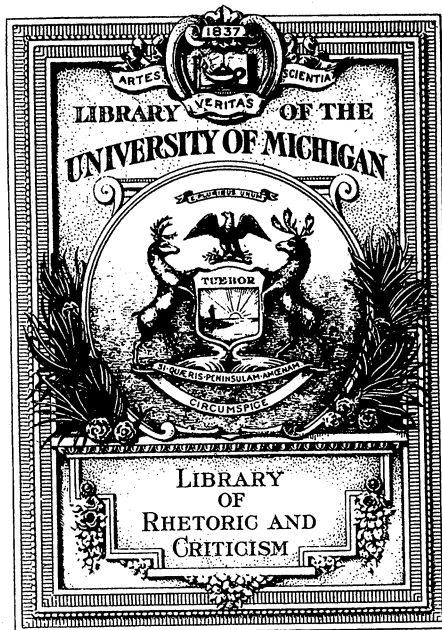
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